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UNCLAS KUWAIT 000326

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA PI CATHERINE BOURGEOIS, NEA/PPD JOHN KINCANNON, NEA/ARP CLAIRE KANESHIRO AND TRACY ROBERTS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SOCI](#) [KMPI](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OEXC](#) [XF](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: MEPI EDUCATION: DEVELOPING THE PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS  
CONCEPT: KUWAIT

REF: A) SECSTATE 11812

B) 03 SECSTATE 337476

(U) SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED--PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: PAO and APAO met with Kuwait's Minister of Education, Rashid al-Hamad, to discuss the MEPI Partnership Schools concept and other issues. The minister told us that he is interested in principle in working with the USG in establishing 2-3 such schools in Kuwait, and said that he would welcome the visit of MEPI staff to Kuwait during the February/March timeframe to discuss the issue in more detail. He also said that Kuwait along with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Yemen had signed an agreement with Harcourt publishers to translate science and mathematics textbooks into Arabic. End summary.

2. (SBU) PAO and APAO met with Rashid al-Hamad, Kuwait's Minister of Education, on January 24 to discuss the MEPI "Partnership Schools" initiative and the issue of educational reform in Kuwait overall. The minister opened the meeting by noting that he budgets a substantial portion of his time each day for visits by members of Kuwait's National Assembly, who drop by to advise/hector the Minister on when, how and to what extent the Ministry should proceed with its announced plans to overhaul Kuwait's educational curricula and under-performing primary and secondary school system. (Note: Conservative members of Kuwait's National Assembly have harshly criticized Ministry of Education intentions to remove or place into a modern context Quranic texts that are used to support anti-western or anti-Jewish perspectives, claiming that such reforms are at the behest of the US Embassy in Kuwait. Statements by Ministry of Education and other GOK officials on the issue of what precisely will be done to shore up Kuwait's underperforming educational structure have accordingly been ambiguous, and it appears at this point that while some steps are being taken to improve mathematics and science education, measures to address more controversial areas such as social science, literature and religious studies have been shelved in the face of Islamist criticism. End note.)

3. (SBU) Despite his sensitivity to criticism by Islamists, Dr. al-Hamad said that he was interested in principle in working with the USG to establish 2-3 MEPI "Partnership Schools" in Kuwait's public schools, and that he did not/not believe that there would be significant opposition within Kuwaiti society to such coordination. He said that he would welcome a visit by MEPI staff in the February/March timeframe. He confirmed that there were no examples of charter schools or other alternative education models currently operating in Kuwait's public education system.

4. (SBU) Comment: We made clear to the Minister that we were only interested in gauging his interest in participating in this program, and that we were in no way presenting a demarche or otherwise suggesting that his ministry should work with MEPI on the Partnership School Initiative. The fact that he seemed genuinely interested in pursuing this project is therefore very encouraging, as is the fact that his Ministry has recently announced that it will work with the World Bank on a six-year program to raise educational standards in Kuwait. We would note, however, that we have seen other bold initiatives by Dr. al-Hamad's predecessor at the Ministry of Education melt away under withering criticism from Islamists, and can only hope that the minister's commitment will be sustained. Post will continue to work with MEPI Catherine Bourgeois and others on this program.

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